



## MENTAL HEALTH FIRST AID



**What is Mental Health First Aid?** Mental Health First Aid (MHFA) is the initial help given to someone who may be developing a mental health problem or experiencing a mental health crisis. The aid provided is not a substitute for professional help, but may help in stabilizing the person until appropriate professional or other assistance (including peer and family support) can be engaged.

**Description of the Program:** This 12-hour course teaches people how to give first aid to individuals experiencing a mental health crisis situation and/or who are in the early stages of a mental health disorder. Participants will learn the signs and symptoms of the most common mental health problems, where and when to get help, and what type of help has been shown to be effective.

- Mental health problems covered include depression, anxiety disorders, schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, eating disorders, and substance use disorders. Self-injury as a symptom also is included.
- Crisis situations covered include suicidal behaviors, acute stress reaction after a recent trauma, panic attack, acute psychotic behavior, and drug overdose.

Participants learn to use the **Mental Health First Aid Action Plan**, abbreviated as **ALGEE**:

- A**ssess risk of suicide or harm
- L**isten non-judgmentally
- G**ive reassurance and information
- E**ncourage the person to get appropriate professional help
- E**ncourage self-help and other support strategies from peers, family members, and friends.

**Aim:** This course is designed to increase mental health literacy, to decrease stigmatizing attitudes in our communities toward people who experience mental health problems, and to increase appropriate and early help-seeking for people with mental health problems.

Certified MHFA/USA Instructors deliver the 12-hour course, which can be scheduled flexibly. These Instructors have successfully completed an intensive, authorized five-day training course to become accredited MHFA/USA Instructors.

**MHFA History:** In 2001, Betty Kitchener and Professor Tony Jorm developed the initial Mental Health First Aid Training and Research Program in Australia. The program currently is available in Australia, Canada, England, Finland, Hong Kong, Northern Ireland, Scotland, Singapore, South Africa, China, and Wales. Because regular First Aid is such a familiar concept, individuals easily grasp the underlying principles of Mental Health First Aid, quickly relate to the need for such programming, and seek involvement. One challenge has been to keep up with the demand while maintaining quality and program fidelity so that results are consistent. The curriculum is interactive; class size is generally limited to 20-22 participants to maintain a quality experience.

**Demonstrated Results:** Evaluations of the MHFA Program in Australia have demonstrated a number of participant benefits:

- Better recognition of mental health problems;
- Beliefs about evidence-based treatments become closer to those held by mental health professionals;
- Reduced stigma surrounding mental illnesses;
- Increased confidence in providing help to others;
- Greater amount of help provided to others in the six months following the course.

**For more information on Mental Health First Aid, please contact:**

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**What Is Next?** The Missouri MHFA team, the National Council for Community Behavioral Healthcare, and the Maryland MHFA team are working collaboratively to synchronize a national effort: Mental Health First Aid/USA. This action includes coordinated trainings and materials, a national website, and a results-oriented evaluation. Together, the three collaborators have built a national training team.

A business plan is under development to provide for long-term sustainability and certification standards that ensure compliance with the original curriculum has been established. The University of Maryland is designing an evaluation protocol so that results build on the foundation achieved in other parts of the world.

**Show Me How!** Missouri is working to roll this program out for neighborhoods, for staff and volunteers who work with older adults, for businesses and corporations who lose time due to workers' depression and other mental health needs, and for state employees. Both law enforcement and emergency response workers also have expressed an interest in the training. Five universities in Missouri are introducing MHFA on campuses this fall in a variety of ways – from targeting residence hall staff to senior nursing students to inter-session credit work for faculty.

The Missouri Foundation for Health awarded a grant to the Missouri Department of Mental Health to offer the 12-Hour MHFA course in 17 counties in southeast and southwest Missouri. Committed Caring Faith Communities will partner with local Community Mental Health Centers to make Mental Health First Aid available through faith-based organizations.

**Get Involved:** Become involved in Mental Health First Aid! Organize a group of 20 folks to complete the 12-hour course. Offer to provide manuals for a group that is committed to taking the 12-hour course. Talk with your neighbors and church members about this opportunity. Sponsor an individual for a scholarship... Now is the time for action in our country. MHFA is yet another resource for communities, businesses, and individuals seeking to build mental wellness.